



Larner, WJ., & Butler, M. (2005). Governmentalities of local partnerships : the rise of a "partnering state" in New Zealand. *Studies in Political Economy*, 75, 85 - 108. <http://hdl.handle.net/1983/1012>

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GOVERNMENTALITIES OF LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS: THE RISE OF A “PARTNERING STATE” IN NEW ZEALAND

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Introduction In discussions of neoliberalism, the “New Zealand Experiment” of the 1980s and 1990s is often seen as a paradigmatic case.¹ It was an early, and, to a certain extent, exemplary instance of the move towards new understandings of economy and society. International attention focused on this country not only because of the depth and speed of the reforms instituted by successive governments since 1984, but also because this case appeared to involve the direct application of a clearly delineated theoretical model. Today, the “new New Zealand Experiment” is also receiving international attention. The fifth Labour government, elected in 1999, has explicitly stated its ambitions to move away from neoliberalism and reinvent social democracy.² What are the political possibilities available for a small open country in a globalizing world? How might a viable economic base be recreated in the context of new forms of international competitiveness based on knowledge, innovation, and creativity? Is it possible to create a new basis for social inclusion that avoids both the assumptions of the male breadwinner model of the postwar welfare state (which had exclusionary implications for women, Maori, and migrants) and the market-driven model of neoliberalism (which resulted in significantly increased social and spatial polarization)? How might economic and social relations be reconnected when the former are oriented towards increasing participation in the globalizing economy and the latter are increasingly premised on localized and particularistic forms of community?

It is in this context that local partnerships have become an integral component of government-community relations in New Zealand, rising to new political prominence as a means of formulating social policy and delivering social services. Most immediately, this emphasis on partnership reflects the wider political predilections of the fifth Labour government and the new "social development" approach to social policy. Building on the findings of the Community and Voluntary Sector Working Group³ (which documented the distrust and unhappiness generated by the more market-oriented approach of the 1980s and 1990s) and complemented by the work of the Advisory Group on the Review of the Centre⁴ (which recommended multi-agency responses to cross-cutting problems), there is now a widespread emphasis on collaborative approaches in the social sector. Now government departments and community activists alike are devoting considerable resources to developing and sustaining local partnerships. This has involved identifying, naming, and categorizing various initiatives that bring together government agencies, local institutions, and community groups, thereby constituting local partnerships as a recognizable and named phenomenon. But what do these relationships look like in practice? How are they being governed? And what implications do these new governmental strategies have?

In this paper, we use the term "local partnerships" to describe the multi-level collaborative arrangements that aspire to "join up" central government agencies, local institutions (e.g., local authorities, schools, hospitals), and/or community and voluntary sector groups and iwi/Maori groups; that is, they are likely to involve a tripartite structure that crosscuts traditional vertically organized relationships. In this way, we distinguish local partnerships from other forms of interorganizational working such as intersectoral forums among government agencies, and recent attempts by community and voluntary agencies to work in more collaborative ways. Our focus is on the "headline" local partnerships in which government departments are experimenting with alternative ways of addressing social problems. In addition, there is an enormous range of partnerships at regional and community levels.⁵ In all cases, however, local partnerships aspire to address community development through "bottom up" rather than more traditional "top down" approaches, and are based on the idea that communities themselves have the

best knowledge of their social service issues and needs (or could readily determine these if they had the resources to do so).

Not only are these local partnership programmes becoming an increasingly normalized aspect of the delivery of social services, they are also having implications for the broader operations of government, even though the actual partnership programmes themselves remain a relatively minor component of government spending. The pronounced shift towards "mandatory partnership working" has raised important issues for those who would aspire to create and sustain local partnerships. Most immediately, these "unnatural groupings" require that considerable effort be put into building relationships. It is also important to recognize that while those involved are optimistic about the possibilities offered by the current political moment, the historic antagonism and disapproval between government and community organizations has not necessarily abated; there continues to be considerable skepticism about the motivation for local partnerships. The time-consuming nature of relationship-building also raises major dilemmas in contexts where there are pressing needs. Is it appropriate for government agencies to "impose" a partnership approach to achieve their outcomes, rather than waiting for the relationship-building to be complete? Then there are more practical questions: how can partnerships be sustained in the face of staff turnover? How can a loan agreement, which is a legal document, be put together in a "partnering way?"

In efforts to address these concerns, government departments are now devoting time and resources to assist the formation of local partnerships through mechanisms such as searchable web pages, good practice guides, checklists, transferable governance models, and evaluations. Of particular interest here are the ways in which the governing of local partnerships involve particular representations of political processes, as well as the invention of techniques capable of governing these processes. Seen through the lens of the neo-Foucauldian governmentality literature, the good practice guides, transferable models, and evaluations now proliferating in the social sector are not simply neutral tools; they are governmental techniques that represent and help constitute governmental spaces and subjects in particular forms. However, at the same time as these techniques are being transferred

into the social sector and reinforced through formal dissemination processes, they are also being transformed to encompass more collaborative aspirations. In this regard, not only do they have significant implications for the forms that local partnerships take, they also impose new expectations on government agencies themselves.

Our analysis of this distinctive change in state practices concludes that in New Zealand the rise of local partnerships has resulted in significant changes in relationships between government agencies and community organizations. This is contrary to claims made elsewhere that the rise of local partnerships represents the continuation of a top-down managerial process in which a neoliberal state still controls community processes and outcomes despite the rhetoric of devolution.⁶ In our case, as local partnerships have been "governmentalized," not only have new understandings of the spaces and subjects of social policy been mobilized, so too is a new role for a "partnering state" emerging.

Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Sociology Notwithstanding recent calls for greater attention to the diverse historical geographies of neoliberalism,⁷ to date the emphasis has remained on describing universalizing disembodied processes that manifest themselves in similar ways in different places. Neoliberalism continues to be used largely as a short-hand term for the preference for market provisioning of goods and services, and the analytical emphasis is on demonstrating the new forms of economic and social inequality that ensue. One consequence is that critical social scientists tend to share an understanding that contemporary political processes are inherently problematic. We tell and retell stories of unrelenting doom: of the global hegemony of market logic; the shrinking state, and the new emphasis on individual responsibility. This article challenges these tendencies both theoretically and politically. It develops an indepth analysis of a particular aspect of changing state practices, emphasizing that new governmental forms emerge out of multiple politicized processes, and do not have predictable outcomes. As Clarke⁸ emphasizes, "Making contestation a feature of the analysis matters; while neoliberalism may claim that 'there is no alternative,' we should not."

Our analytical starting point is the neo-Foucauldian literature on neoliberalism. One of the major accomplishments of the governmentality literature has been to focus attention on the relatively mundane practices through which political power is exercised. This has given rise to an innovative reading of neoliberalism, in which neoliberalism is not understood as a philosophy or an ideology, nor as the most recent manifestation of a capitalist agenda, but rather as an assemblage of rationalities, strategies, technologies, and techniques that allow "government at a distance."⁹ This analysis of neoliberalism has underpinned a diverse range of empirical studies across the social sciences that have drawn attention to the ways in which organizations, communities, and individuals have become implicated in the process of governing. Without denying that neoliberalism has increased economic and social polarization, these accounts focus on the "how" of contemporary forms of governance. In this way, governmentality has marked a significant advance in our understanding of the rationalities and modalities of power configuring our political present.¹⁰

The use of the term "community" has received particular prominence in these discussions. It is increasingly well understood that, rather than the universalist conceptions of society of the postwar period, social policies and programmes now explicitly target diverse and multiple communities. Notably, Nikolas Rose observes the seduction of the term community with its positive affirmative connotations, and argues that this helps explain why community has become an object and target for the exercise of political power. He states:

(T)his community is not simply a geographical space, a social space, a sociological space or a space of services, although it may attach itself to any or all such spatializations. It is a moral field binding people into durable relations. It is a space of emotional relationships through which individual identities are constructed through their bonds to micro-cultures of values and meanings.¹¹

Recent contributions to the social policy literature that draw on these neo-Foucauldian accounts show that local partnerships are part of the governmentalization of community. They emphasize that local partnerships involve government strategies for cultivating and utilizing community allegiances,

and, in doing so, these strategies constitute new spaces and subjects of social policy. Marinetto,¹² for example, focuses on the ideological predilections embodied in local partnerships, arguing that community has been used by New Labour to reinvent the party's social democratic ethos and ideals. He suggests that this is not simply a rhetorical ploy; rather, he documents a range of recent urban and regional initiatives that bring together government and community. Closer to our particular interests in this paper is the recent work of Schofield,¹³ who focuses on the governmentalization of community through plans, policies, and practices. As he stresses, following Rose, governments must know, calculate, and measure the objects of their concerns. His article discusses a range of techniques such as books, management models, and card games through which "community" is being constituted as an ongoing pragmatic process. Elsewhere we have discussed how strategies such as community consultations, action plans, visioning exercises, and community action days are also being used to reconstitute individual citizens as community subjects.¹⁴

Geographical accounts of local partnership programmes have focused on how these techniques are associated with the respatialization of social policy.¹⁵ They show that the social is being reimagined as a set of contiguous, but physically discrete, communities spread out across the nation-state. It is argued that community is being physically fixed in the geographical neighbourhoods where people choose (or are forced by socioeconomic pressures) to live, rather than in the communities based on identity or interest which bring people together through significant contact.¹⁶ However, despite efforts to geographically "fix" communities, the spatialities of community being institutionalized are diverse, complicated by the fact that the territorial boundaries for different institutions vary (for example, between central government agencies and local authorities). Indeed, as Porter and Craig emphasize, within this new ethos it almost seems that any spatial fix will do, and different spatialities are used for different functions.¹⁷

As Cruikshank¹⁸ and Walters¹⁹ highlight, these indirect forms of rule also embody a consensual political imagination which exercises its own forms of power. Seen in this context, efforts to build community involve what Foucault calls an "etho-politics"—the targetting of civility, levels of trust,

intensity of community feeling, and the extent of voluntary endeavour. The aim is to create new moral and ethical subjects who understand they have a duty to both themselves and others. These are individualized subjects, but they already have specific ties to family and community. They are also culturally and socially diverse. Learning to cope with contestation and the pluralization of community demands are integral to the processes associated with ethopolitics. But what happens when "the language of community and trust meets the quantitative thrust of modern economic analysis?"²⁰ Walters himself explores the discourse of social capital which is, of course, an important contribution to this articulation in its attempts to measure forms and degrees of connectedness. Our focus herein is slightly different. We examine the multiple means and mechanisms through which local partnerships are being governed, and show how these also involve innovative and experimental efforts to render political and ethical fields in codified and quantitative terms.²¹

In doing so, we also attempt to move past existing governmentality analyses. If governmentality studies have allowed significant advances in the study of neoliberalism, they are not without their problems. Notably, Hindess²² has criticized these studies for their failure to distinguish adequately between the governmental and the political. On a similar note, O'Malley²³ and O'Malley, Shearing and Weir²⁴ stress that governmentality studies, with their emphasis on the programmatic and rationalizing aspects of governance, tend to greatly understate not just the incoherence of power, but the extent to which government is frequently invented from below. Certainly, governmentality analyses of local partnerships and other community development initiatives have not often emphasized the hybrid nature of contemporary forms of rule.

Against those who would maintain a cautious distance between governmentality research and sociology, O'Malley and Garland²⁵ argue that some of these conceptual oversights could be addressed through a more prominent role for sociological investigation—as opposed to textual analysis—within studies of governmentality.

In the spirit of these suggestions, this paper focuses on the processes through which local partnerships have become "governmentalized" in New

Zealand—the discourses and practices through which local partnerships have become a taken-for-granted aspect of social policies and programmes—and explores their implications for both the internal dynamics of partnership-working and the broader configurations of state power. In developing this analysis, we aspire to move beyond an “excessively coherent” view of local partnerships, and avoid the risk of portraying the New Zealand experience as simply another instantiation of the general principles of neoliberalism.²⁶ We develop our claims based on the findings of a major empirical research programme on local partnerships and governance in New Zealand. Our particular focus is on the “headline” local partnerships; those that join together government departments, local institutions, and community groups into new configurations that crosscut more traditional vertical relationships. The research began with a major internet search to identify relevant partnership programmes, supported by consultation and discussion with key informants nation-wide. This was followed with a Wellington-based workshop that involved representatives from all of the social sector ministries. From the initial list of 54 partnership programmes that appeared to meet our criteria, this process allowed us to isolate 24 local partnership programmes, accounting for more than 850 operational projects.²⁷ We have since collated relevant documentation associated with these programmes, attended a variety of seminars and discussion groups, and are currently conducting a further round of interviews examining the career trajectories of those people who have been employed by government departments to create and sustain local partnership programmes.

The “Governmentalization” of Partnership It is acknowledged in the wider social policy literature that discussion of partnerships is characterized by “methodological anarchy and definitional chaos.”²⁸ Indeed, some commentators have observed that the contradictory features of partnerships may be their most interesting feature—practically, politically, and analytically.²⁹ It is not surprising, then, that the first point of emphasis in this analysis of local partnerships in New Zealand is their highly differentiated character. As mentioned earlier, most headline local partnerships are pilot programmes in which government departments experiment with alterna-

tive ways of addressing social problems. Some have involved the global scanning of local partnership programmes elsewhere, exemplifying the processes associated with transnational “fast policy;”³⁰ others, however, have involved the “scaling up” of more localized initiatives. The actual form of the partnership programmes is highly variable, dependent on the government department, intermediate institution, and communities concerned. There are also conflicts when participants play multiple roles: e.g., government agencies as both funders and partners; local government as both government and community representatives, and community organizations as both service providers and community representatives. There is not necessarily a correlation between formal partnership status and the amount of practical input and “on the ground” decisionmaking provided by the partners. Indeed, we were forced to conclude very early on that local partnerships are, by definition, highly specific and that this characteristic is both their strength and a source of new challenges.

In this context, it has been somewhat unnerving to observe the shift from partnerships as localized initiatives emerging out of the activities of a group of like-minded organizations and/or individuals, to partnership working as a “mandatory tool” in the broader social sector. While efforts to build and sustain local partnerships remain relatively insignificant in relation to overall government spending in the social sector, and while there is, as yet, little empirical evidence about the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the move towards local partnerships, there is an increasing expectation among public servants and community activists alike that “best practice” for government agencies will involve more collaborative approaches. Despite the skepticism found in international literature on partnerships, and indeed among some of the players themselves, it is widely assumed by both the current government and community organizations that partnerships are mutually beneficial, and that efforts to “join together” different organizations will draw together otherwise separate institutional worlds. From the Prime Minister’s Office down, considerable energy is now being devoted to the formalization of partnership “as our normal way of doing business”³¹ in the effort to overcome the increased economic and social polarization that characterized the more market-oriented neoliberalism of the 1980s and 1990s.

Most immediately, this is having implications for those involved in the social sector. Both central and local government agencies are seeking out those individuals who can build collaborative relationships between government, local institutions, and communities. In each of the local partnerships being examined, there are designated personnel charged with the task of developing and maintaining the partnership programme. Larner and Craig³² identify the increased visibility of "partnership managers" who are most likely to be located within government agencies, and "social entrepreneurs" who are more likely to be locally based in either territorial authorities or community organizations.³³ These roles are now formally identified in institutional structures, policy documents, and programme design. Local partnerships also usually have a designated coordinator responsible for project management, often assisted by a community advisory group or steering committee. In some cases, the coordinator is also responsible for overall facilitation and relationship-building. The coordinators usually report to the intermediate institution, but sometimes to the relevant government department. Those who fill these positions are not required only to exercise new forms of leadership and management skills, they are also expected to introduce new cultures of working and learning into their institutions.

More generally, relationship-building is becoming a crucial part of research, policymaking, and service provision.³⁴ Evidence of the increasing tendency to see relationship-building not just as another job competency, but rather as a key outcome, can be seen in job descriptions for new positions and in changing human resources practices; for example, the move towards remuneration policies that reward employees for cultural responsiveness and relationship-building. This trend is being further facilitated by the increased movement of people between central government, local institutions, and community groups, both permanently and by secondment. There is also some evidence of new forms of expertise developing around local partnerships; for example, the use of external facilitators to help build relationships. These developments reflect the efforts of knowing subjects who are very aware of the political significance of the current moment and are trying to do something new in the name of community. Roelvink and Craig³⁵ emphasize the feminized nature of these positions, arguing that women are doing

much of the "emotional labour" associated with partnership-working. Moreover, Maori and Pacific people are also disproportionately represented in the new positions in government departments, reflecting a new emphasis on the need to work effectively across diverse political and cultural contexts.³⁶

These new actors are expected to embody both the traditional technical and organizational skills of public servants as well as the new skills demanded by local partnerships i.e., building relationships, creating supportive environments, demonstrating cultural sensitivity, and strengthening community action. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that many of those employed by government agencies to develop local partnerships have backgrounds in community-based organizations.³⁷ They are also positioned in relation to new assumptions about cultural-appropriate service delivery, particularly when working with Maori and Pacific peoples.³⁸ Policymakers, researchers, and evaluators alike are now required to acknowledge the voices of various stakeholder communities, and make these views publicly available; hence the increasing expectation that research and evaluation findings will be produced in forms that can be readily "picked up" by diverse cultural and social groups. Not surprisingly, the expectation that these diverse skills will be embodied in the same person or team is raising important issues in relation to training and skill sets. The demand for constant networking that characterizes these positions can easily lead to overcommitment and the intensification of labour. Indeed, in some cases it has given rise to unrealistic expectations about what is possible, as is demonstrated in a recent Healthy Housing tender in which the multiple requirements of the evaluation (e.g., technical competencies in evaluation research and analysis, experience of research with Maori, cultural competencies, knowledge of a wide range of substantive areas, managerial and relational competencies) meant it has proved extremely difficult to find a suitably qualified team willing to take on the multiple tasks in the time frame available.

Governing as a Technical Process But governing is not only a social process, it is also a technical process. An integral aspect of the governmentization of local partnerships has been the rise of what might be called "neosocial" techniques. Just as neoliberalism is premised on the invention

of techniques that encourage people to act as market citizens, these "neoso-
cial" techniques aim to create the conditions that will encourage people to
act more relationally. One consequence is that new emphases on "joining
up" diverse stakeholders and developing experimental and innovative
approaches to community development now sit alongside concerns for
clarity, streamlining, and accountability in planning regimes, employment
arrangements, and decisionmaking models in social policy initiatives.

In this context, the "good practice" guides that have begun to proliferate
in the social sector are notable. Early examples were designed to improve the
transparency of government processes, for example the funding guides
produced by the Department of Internal Affairs and Local Government
New Zealand. There have also been attempts to improve contractual relation-
ships with the publication by Treasury of guidelines for contracting with
Non Governmental Organizations,³⁹ and important efforts to build
horizontal relationships between community organizations. More relevant
to this paper, however, is the emergence of documents focusing explicitly on
the "how to" of partnerships, including the Ministry of Social Development
publication *Mosaics/Whakaahua Papariki*,⁴⁰ which emerged out of the Review
of the Centre work stream, and the www.participate.govt.nz webpage that
builds on the work of the Community and Voluntary Sector Working Group.
These "good practice" guides make a major contribution to the "normal-
ization" of collaboration and partnerships as a preferred way of operating
among government departments. They also delineate between different
forms of collaboration and partnership; for example, the differences between
interagency service delivery and regional coordination discussed in *Mosaics*.

There is also an explicit search underway for transferable governance,
funding, and decisionmaking models. Documents such as Memorandums
of Understanding, Terms of Reference, Project Protocols, Charters, and
Statements of Intent are emerging as key mechanisms for addressing the
"how to" questions about building local partnerships between different
organizations. Templates for these documents are being developed and shared
among those involved in diverse partnership initiatives. These formal agree-
ments, which lay down mutual expectations of the partners, allow some of
the more practical issues involved with developing local partnerships to be

addressed.⁴¹ There is also discussion of the need to "incentivize" collabora-
tion through, for example, key performance indicators and performance
objectives.⁴² This involves building the development of partnerships into
formal accountability processes. While the parties may have different ratio-
nales for developing the local partnership, and may expect to get quite
different things out of them, these "relational contracts" provide a mecha-
nism for specifying and aligning outputs and outcomes, so allowing partners
to effectively "join up."

Finally, there are arguments for the need for better monitoring mecha-
nisms to address the question of how effective collaboration improves
outcomes for citizens. So evaluation is a third process contributing to the
governmentalization of partnerships.⁴³ There has been a move away from
evaluations that emphasize short-term "outputs," and an explicit move to
include "process outcomes" based on criteria such as improved relation-
ships, mutual respect, better communication, and information-sharing and
higher levels of trust. In part, this reflects the new "Managing for Outcomes"
strategic planning process across government.⁴⁴ But the content of the
outcomes has also shifted. Not only do they include the high-level outcomes
of the government, they also emphasize "process outcomes" based on criteria
such as improved relationships, mutual respect, better communication and
information-sharing and higher levels of trust. At a project level, new dimen-
sions of people's lives, such as self-esteem and well being, are being centred.
In addition, the emphasis on process has seen a move from static to dynamic
conceptions of accountability. Participants in partnerships are now exhorted
to "share information," "identify and use the right meeting processes," and
"take a holistic approach." The rise of participatory evaluation strategies has
been a particularly important component of this shift, and has further
consolidated the need for collaboration.⁴⁵

The Partnering State? These new techniques are interesting in and of
themselves. What is particularly striking, however, is that despite all these
efforts to create and institutionalize local partnerships, very little is known
about their actual benefits. Of the 24 headline local partnership programmes
identified in our research, as of December 2003 only eight have been formally

evaluated, although another three evaluations are in progress and two more are proposed. In part, this reflects the relatively recent establishment of these programmes. But there is a broader anxiety around the evaluation of these programmes, and some hesitancy to go public with the respective findings. Most immediately, this is because of the potential implications for funding, but, as discussed in more detail below, it also reflects the very real difficulties associated with evaluating in a new context where it is the quality of relationships and progress towards high-level outcomes that are being measured and evaluated, as well as the more traditional emphasis on outputs. As the Regional Partnerships Programme Review stresses; "Partnership evaluation is a complex process, with very few international guidelines and/or best practice examples."⁴⁶

Nor is there any broader evidence to support the new political preference for local partnerships. Indeed, there is considerable skepticism in both the international and national literatures on local partnerships, and among some of the partnership participants themselves. There is very little proof, either national or international, that partnerships improve outcomes for individuals, families, or communities.⁴⁷ Major international studies also stress that "what counts as success varies enormously between initiatives (and) is a product of a range of place specific factors that cannot be assumed to exist or be induced elsewhere."⁴⁸ Participants have been warned that local partnerships are time and resource intensive, and that there are limits to what they can achieve.⁴⁹ More recently, the Ministry of Social Development itself has said that "collaboration cannot be an end in itself, it must deliver clear and measurable outcomes for individuals and communities, and create benefits for the people, agencies, and organizations involved."⁵⁰ Seen in this context, local partnership programmes involve central and local government risking resources without any guarantee of future gains.

Yet despite the lack of empirical evidence and the cautions being expressed by some participants themselves, there is an increasing amount of activity around local partnerships: new programmes are being created and promoted, people are being hired, "good practice" guides are being written, and governance models are being shared. Why are government agencies and community-based partnership advocates alike committing significant

amounts of time and energy to developing partnerships when there is no evidence to support their preference? When asked, many of those involved emphasize that local partnerships improve process. It is being assumed that better relationships in principle will lead to better relationships in practice, even in those cases where it is acknowledged that these relationships are unlikely to improve the efficiency of service delivery or lead to improved outcomes for communities or citizens. Indeed, arguably the rise of local partnerships represents a new tension between what we might call "evidence-based" (we'll do it because we know it works) and "values-based" (we'll do it because we think partnerships are a good thing) approaches to policy-making and service provision.

Local partnerships have thus involved a shift in emphasis within the state itself: from the neoliberal emphasis on outputs to a new emphasis on what one of our research participants describes (sometimes with a sigh) as "process, process, process." The significance of these efforts to institutionalize process should not be underestimated. It is in documents such as "good practice" guides, in the invention of transferable models, and in the findings of partnership evaluations, as well as in a range of more general documents that the "unwritten rules" of partnership are now being written down. Their principles, aims, and goals are being specified, ritualized, and broken down into component parts that can then brought to bear on the interactions and activities of the various participants. Seen in this context, the various attempts to institutionalize partnerships might seem like an example of "social contractualism."⁵¹ In contrast to competitive contractualism, in which the focus of the contract is on the exchange of goods and services, social contractualism centres on the conduct of ongoing relationships. However, whereas Yeatman's analysis focuses on individuals, the efforts to govern the conduct of relationships discussed herein focus on institutions and organizations. In this context, the term "partnering state" refers to the expectation that partnership will become an integral aspect of governmental processes.

Is the Partnering State a Neoliberal State? While it may be tempting to see the developments discussed above simply as the importation of market techniques into the social sector, we suggest that they highlight the need to

think carefully about the different versions of these techniques, and the diverse ways in which they can be harnessed to political projects. In this context, we are skeptical of claims that local partnerships are merely an ideological shell for neoliberalism, and of arguments that they reinforce the centralization of the state and traditional forms of expertise. Imrie and Raco,⁵² for example, argue that the rise of local partnerships has reinforced the role of traditional experts, such as planners, and that this has been reinforced by managerial systems that require local agencies and communities to open themselves up to bureaucratic scrutiny. We have been trying to emphasize how, as local partnership programmes have become an increasingly normalized aspect of the delivery of social services in New Zealand, they have had implications not only for the spaces and subjects of social policy, but they have also involved the mobilization of new forms of expertise premised on the ability to build relationships between government agencies and communities, and the invention of new techniques designed to institutionalize collaborative processes.

In turn, these new forms of expertise and techniques are reconstituting the state itself. Effective local partnerships involve the reconciliation of conflicting values and accountabilities; those involved need to address both the broad goals of government agencies and the specific community's needs and priorities. In turn, this requires participants to be able to "look both ways." Particular attention is being paid to the involvement and status of Maori and Pacific peoples, not only via the more traditional mechanism of the allocation of funding streams specifically targetted for Maori and Pacific peoples, but also through the development and implementation of Treaty-based and other culturally specific strategies in "mainstream programmes." The emphasis on responsiveness to local and cultural specificities has seen the rise of processes and mechanisms that can be "tailored to fit the initiative,"⁵³ hence the increased importance of devolved decisionmaking, personnel, and funding. At the same time, it is important to avoid "reinventing the wheel," to build on what has worked well elsewhere, and to avoid duplicating activities already occurring locally.⁵⁴ To achieve these goals, government departments, local institutions, and community activists alike draw on a repertoire that centres the new "neosocial" techniques in

efforts to overcome the cynicism and distrust that lingers from the competitive contractualist approaches to government/community relations of the 1980s and 1990s.

The neosocial techniques are designed to help formalize collective visions, principles, and values, and to establish some of the ways in which resources and tasks might be allocated based on those aspirations. Of particular significance is the perceived need to document these processes. While it is recognized that the risk of writing down these aspirations is that it makes it difficult to deal with the changing content of relationships, it is argued that this process helps to develop a common language and shared ideas. Not insignificantly, this formalization also establishes a basis for mutual accountabilities, liability, and sanction. In this context, it is interesting to observe that while "relational contracts" provide a means to move beyond more traditional contracts for service and offer opportunities to develop more innovative ways of working, important questions are now being asked about their status. Some commentators have begun to argue that there is a difference between formal partnership documents and the process of "partnering." Whereas the formal documents are seen as specifying mandates, accountability, and resourcing and so are legally enforceable, partnering simply involves establishing "team rules" that set out processes for working together.

Not only are local partnerships becoming an increasingly normalized aspect of social policy, they are also having implications for the broader operations of government. Indeed, changing the culture of government departments is, in many respects, the most important work being done by the local partnership programmes. As the Ministry of Social Development⁵⁵ itself recently observed, "government agencies are hampered by a culture of secrecy. Many agencies need to create a more open and honest culture, and actively encourage and support collaboration as part of core business." Local partnership programmes are also being used to justify new forms of expenditure and push out time frames for community development projects. More generally, both government agencies and community activists are now seeking partnerships agreements instead of traditional contracts, arguing for social audits in which the quality of relationships are assessed, and advocating for "process" and "formative" evaluations in which the evaluators play a mentoring rather

than a monitoring role. In this context, the forms of expertise and techniques being developed through the pilot partnership programmes are having implications well beyond the actual programmes themselves.

At the same time, however, it is clear the new "partnering state" remains a neoliberal state form. Most immediately, despite the political claims that neoliberalism is over, there are clearly important continuities with the earlier period of "competitive contractualism." For example, local partnerships continue to be governed by the broader parameters of the Public Finance Act 1989. Financial transparency, administrative efficiency, cost effectiveness, and the robustness of reporting requirements also remain key criteria for local partnerships. Despite the new emphasis on relationality, contracts for service and legally defined fundholding arrangements are integral to their actual workings. Benchmarking and audit are "normalized" parts not only of government departments' activities, but also of community organizations' expectations. Indeed, it is notable that issues like governance structures and compliance costs are talked about in very "taken-for-granted" ways amongst partnership participants. So, too, is the need to quantify "outputs" —the production of certain materials or the delivery of particular services in local partnerships.

It is also important to note that, at the same time as these new techniques aim to improve processes by opening up social policy and service provision to a broader range of constituencies, they allow for the management of risk. As Brady^{vi} explains in a paper written for the New Zealand Treasury, the advantage of centralization is that it allows the government to manage processes closely, and thus manage risks directly. Once people step away from more conventional contractual relationships and open up processes to a variety of stakeholders, a wide range of new pressures emerge involving, for example, competing values, different ways of working, the need to manage multiple relationships at any one time, and the heightened risk of personality conflicts. Consequently decentralization requires new incentive mechanisms, guidelines, reporting requirements, and performance monitoring. The good practice guides, transferable models, and evaluations discussed here are all important examples of the mechanisms through which these new risks are being managed.

Finally, and perhaps most significant, the effort to improve process has involved the increased specification and measurement of relational behaviour. What this means is that there is currently a move from seeing trust, honesty, and collaboration as intangible attributes to the increased specification and measurement of the behaviour associated with the "ethopolitics" of community. Seen in this context, the techniques of local partnerships are indeed becoming governmental (in both the Foucauldian and more conventional senses of this term). They also embody the "government at a distance" that characterizes neoliberalism more generally. Thus the legacy of neoliberalism remains dominant despite efforts to move beyond the political formulations of the 1980s and 1990s.

Conclusion This paper has identified how the new emphasis on local partnership programmes is associated with the rise of neosocial techniques. Despite the lack of evidence that partnership-working improves outcomes for communities, families/*whanau* and individuals, both government agencies and community activists are actively inventing, deploying, and disseminating these neosocial techniques across the social sector, all of which is beginning to have implications for the broader workings of the state itself. The failings are being recognized: for example, it is acknowledged that the codification of trust doesn't always make things better in practice, and that sometimes relational contracts inhibit the expression of different political points of view. There are also concerns that funding will get "squandered" in the relational process. However this has not deterred those involved from devoting increasing amounts of time and energy to making sure that the new emphasis on relationality reaches the highest possible levels, including the New Zealand Treasury and Prime Minister's Office.⁵⁷

It is important to stress that this is not just a top-down process in which a paternalistic state is imposing its logic on the social forces it seeks to regulate; the activities of both public servants and community activists are being reconstituted by these new understandings. The formation of local partnerships involves ongoing discussions and contestations in which it is very difficult to predict which of the stakeholders will base their arguments on the more familiar neoliberal techniques, and who will argue for the

neosocial techniques associated with the rise of local partnerships. Significantly, the continued emphasis on neoliberal techniques does not necessarily come from government agencies. The push for transparent structures and processes is just as likely to come from community representatives themselves, and politics are increasingly fought through these frames of reference. Nor is it unusual for community organizations (particularly those working with Maori and Pacific communities) to ask government agencies for a contract for service rather than a relational contract, stating that the expectations are more straightforward in the case of the former than the later. That said, what is clear in these debates is that the neosocial techniques we have described are now widely accepted among all of the stakeholders, their use is proliferating, and they are increasingly institutionalized.

Not surprisingly, there are major contradictions emerging from the efforts to reconcile neoliberal and neosocial approaches. It is a tension that those stakeholders involved in the Community Road Safety Programme Review frame as "a fundamental difficulty and difference between what is stated in terms of the community development philosophy of the CRSP and the way it is operated."⁵⁸ At present, these dilemmas are being resolved by the development of new indicators to monitor and evaluate collaboration and relationships. As the Ministry of Social Development has said, "collaboration cannot be an end in itself, it must deliver clear and measurable outcomes for individuals and communities, and create benefits for the people, agencies and organizations involved."⁵⁹ Seen in this context, it is significant that there is now a broader discussion of the need to further "incentivize" collaboration by building the development of partnerships into formal accountability processes by including relationship building, collaboration, and Treaty responsiveness as key performance indicators for government departments. Ironically, however, these efforts to further "governmentalize" local partnerships may also work against the ambition to develop local solutions to local problems in that the aspiration to develop generalized and transferable models of success and to disseminate best practice risks a decontextualized "one size fits all" approach that overlooks geographical and social specificities.⁶⁰

It is important to conclude that we are not necessarily critical of the efforts to create and sustain local partnerships. However, our argument is that the

shift towards relationality is neither a straightforward nor unambiguous process. It has involved the uneasy articulation of different discourses emerging out of the efforts of a range of political actors with competing agendas. Moreover, local partnerships have not only been important in redefining the spaces and subjects of social policy, they are also implicated in a significant reconfiguration of state processes. The respatialization and racialization of social policy has been accompanied by the mobilization of new forms of expertise and the redeployment of neoliberal techniques to achieve more collaborative aspirations. But these discourses and practices are not being produced by state actors serving as relatively straightforward agents of neoliberalism, nor do they constitute a top-down, fully realized approach. To use Foucauldian language, we have been describing the process through which a group of disparate initiatives have been made visible in a particular form, given institutional durability, and brought into particular relations with each other.⁶¹ Finally, therefore, the contribution of this paper is to show how close attention to the forms of expertise and governmental techniques involved in the formation of local partnerships allows us to understand more about the rise of a "partnering state."

Notes

This research was funded by the New Zealand Foundation for Research Science and Technology research programme UOAX000233. Earlier versions of the paper received helpful comments at the following conferences: The Sociological Association of Aotearoa New Zealand (Auckland 2003), The American Association of Geographers (Philadelphia 2004), and Contemporary Governance and the Question of the Social (Edmonton 2004).

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